

The Anti-Revisionist Hollywood Movie Attacking Historian David Irving Is a Flop

Review

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Denial. BBC Films. 109 minutes.

This reviewer was expecting that it would be a tedious ordeal to sit through *Denial*, Hollywood's attempted canonization of the obnoxious thought cop Deborah Lipstadt, which was supposed to also serve as the final confirmation of the libel trial in London in 2000 that saw historian David Irving's reputation supposedly shredded (cf. *Revisionist History* no. 86).

Actually, the imps of contrariness have seen to it that *Denial* rehabilitates Irving. While the film's production values are high and the cast is A-list, the director, Mick Jackson, is no Steven Spielberg and his movie backfires. *Denial* gives new impetus to World War II revisionism, which heretofore was assumed by many to consist of a coterie of drooling crackpots. Even in a movie that detests Irving, he nonetheless comes off as a formidable advocate.

There are two challenging questions for any Hollywood director seeking to lens Prof. Lipstadt's courtroom battle and maintain minimal credibility at the same time: why she never took the stand, and why no "Holocaust survivor" was brought to testify by her defense team. According to *Denial*, Lipstadt (played by Rachel Weisz), was forbidden to testify by her lawyers, who wanted to keep the focus on putting Irving (Timothy Spall) on the defensive, and not her. It makes sense, but whether it is true or not we can't determine. After all, Lipstadt refused to speak to the news media during the long trial (a fact the movie omits). The latter refusal would seem to indicate a fear of exposure of her ignorance of World War II history. Meanwhile, Mr. Irving was extensively cross-examined in court and spoke volubly to the press on nearly every occasion.

The second daunting question turns on an even more-perilous and potentially highly damaging issue: why were there no "Holocaust survivors" on the witness stand? Here David Hare, the film's scriptwriter, really goofs and apparently no one on the production team caught his blunder, though many in the audience will spot it. In the movie, Lipstadt is outraged that her lawyers will not call on "survivors" to testify. The head of her defense team, Anthony Julius, has a response. (Julius is rendered as an expressionless, one-dimensional, and in many respects unsympathetic character, played deadpan by actor Andrew Scott, known for roles as the villainous Moriarty in the BBC *Sherlock* TV series, and the traitorous head of the British Secret Service in the 007 film, *Spectre*). We first meet Julius while he is holding a copy of the book he authored which, we see from the cover, traduces the reputation of the esteemed Christian poet T.S. Eliot. Julius informs Prof. Lipstadt that he will not call the "survivors" because he wants to spare them the disrespect which Irving (who acted as his own attorney), would demonstrate toward them in cross-examination.

It's a weak alibi. The honchos of Holocaustianity are painfully aware that putative "homicidal Auschwitz gas-chamber eyewitnesses" were eviscerated under cross-examination by lawyer Doug Christie during the 1985 trial in Canada of Ernst Zündel, for spreading "false news." This was the actual reason there was no appearance by them at Lipstadt's trial. At this point in the film, as I sat in the theater I jotted in

my review notes, “Movie omits to mention Zündel trial’s discrediting cross-examinations of Judaic witnesses.”

Later in the movie however, Lipstadt demands once again that “Holocaust survivors” testify, and this time a more-candid Julius, albeit in rapid-fire dialogue, tells her that he can’t call on them because, “*The survivors were torn apart at the Zündel trial.*”



David Irving at the 1988 trial of Ernst Zündel. Photo from codoh.com

Exactly correct! When so-called “eyewitness Holocaust survivors” were cross-examined in the Zündel case, as detailed in this writer’s *The Great Holocaust Trial*, not one departed the witness stand with his credibility intact—and it is Hollywood’s *Denial* movie that reminds the world of this shocking and embarrassing fact, which shatters the main pillar upon which Auschwitz execution-gas-chamber mythology depends: the “undeniable” testimony of “eyewitnesses.” (The statement about the Zündel trial is made in a stream of verbiage from the Anthony Julius character. It is not said slowly or with emphasis. One has to be alert to catch it in the film).

The movie is haunted by the specter of Zündel, whose two trials (1985 and 1988) are landmarks in revisionism. The film’s opening scene has Prof. Lipstadt in a classroom writing on a chalkboard the four main points of “Holocaust denial.” The last two are borrowed from Prof. Robert Faurisson, the Zündel defense team’s research head, as he stated them in an explosive essay in 1978 in France’s leading newspaper, *Le Monde*. Lipstadt’s point four is straight from Faurisson and rings true: The gas-chamber myth was concocted to “extort money from the Germans and gain sympathy for the state of Israel.” Bingo!

In another of Lipstadt’s classroom points she asserts that any allegation that Judaic casualty figures are exaggerated constitutes “denial.” But unknown to the movie audience, she is herself on record saying that the high casualty figure for German victims of the Allied firebombing of the city of Dresden is exaggerated. The Talmudic double standard makes it perfectly respectable for her to lay a charge of

exaggeration against the history of the Dresden bombing. Ordinary mortals do so with regard to Auschwitz at the risk of forfeiting their employment and reputation.

Early in the movie the viewer is taken on an actual tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, where Lipstadt and her defense team stumble around among the sacred relics. She admonishes her barrister Richard Rampton (Tom Wilkinson) over his insufficient awe and reverence (he makes tearful amends later). The familiar propaganda about the camp is retailed, until the movie gets to a nearly intact old building. Before entering, it is unambiguously stated that to defeat the deniers' position on Auschwitz homicidal gassings, one must defeat the *Leuchter Report*. By now I was wondering if my hearing was faulty, so welcome was this acknowledgement of that momentous study, which is usually demonized by media hacks and academics as a worthless trifle.

The *Leuchter Report* was commissioned by Zündel in the course of his 1988 trial. It reported a forensic, chemical analysis of physical material taken from the walls of buildings in Auschwitz. Revised by former Max Planck Institute chemist and historian Germar Rudolf, the *Leuchter Report* remains one of the most-devastating exposes of the hoax ever published, and here in a Hollywood movie its formidable potency is acknowledged—and never satisfactorily refuted in the course of the film! Although he is not mentioned, when the movie arrives at the courtroom proceedings themselves, the first day concludes with Dr. Faurisson's signature aphorism concerning, "No Holes—No Holocaust."

On another day of the trial, Rampton holds aloft two different editions of Irving's classic history, *Hitler's War*, and points out that the 1977 first edition upholds the genocide of Jews, while the reissued and revised 1991 edition does not. True, but the movie omits what made the difference. Between 1977 and 1991 the two Zündel trials took place with the demolition of "survivor" testimony in the first, and the *Leuchter Report* issued at the second, which impressed Irving so much that he revised his Hitler book to reflect the *Leuchter* revelations which Zündel had made possible.

On occasions after Irving has spoken in court, the camera turns to Lipstadt's character, showing her in paroxysms of frustration and agony. Conversely, when her own lawyer scores a legal or historical point she casts a venomous glance at Irving, suffused with undisguised hatred. The filmmakers have done her image no favors with this less-than-noble—but quite possibly accurate—depiction of her person and reactions.

Another fatal error in the movie's goal of vindicating Lipstadt is that it fails to dispel the David vs. Goliath impression of a stacked legal battle. Irving is shown as a lone warrior up against a legal team that fills a room with solicitors, researchers, historians, archivists and the barrister. The audience watching the mustering of this throng must feel that they've been cheated: after having it shoved down their throats for decades that doubting homicidal gas chambers is the easiest thing in the world to discredit, it takes a host of lawyers, clerks and historians years of research and more than a month in court to refute one Doubting Thomas?

The unintended consequences become more obvious near the end of the movie, when, in a news conference, Lipstadt makes an analogy between revisionist historians and those who doubt that Elvis Presley is dead. Among the theater audience with whom I saw the film, her parallel went nowhere. It is too palpably jejune to gain traction in the face of the battle the viewer has just observed her multi-million-dollar team having undertaken, with several close shaves for them in the courtroom, and the verdict far from a foregone conclusion.

Denial is pompously self-righteous and foolishly bereft of the tedium-relieving humorous moments which clever directors use to leaven even the most serious cinema. Lipstadt is at first presented melodramatically as Destiny's Heroine of the Jewish People From The Beginning of Time. After that gas bag is floated, the movie attempts to deflate it slightly with a few attempts at levity, which are aimed at showing her to be a good sport in spite of her carved-in-marble stature; but these fail. She comes off not as one of the guys but as a *yenta* with a foul mouth: "What the f**k just happened?" she demands to know when the judge states that anti-Semitism can be an honest belief; not necessarily a result of a desire to deceive. Meanwhile, in devastating contrast, Irving is depicted as always in form as an English gentleman, even if at times sarcastic and wounding.

Vile execration of Irving is on ample display: "Irving's words are like s**t on your shoes," says Anthony Julius. In a meeting in her hotel room between Lipstadt and her barrister Rampton, it is made clear that Irving is to be hated, "Look the devil in the eye and tell him what you feel," Rampton advises. God help anyone who would dare to advise us to look upon Deborah Lipstadt as a devil.

The foul-mouthed banter and palpable hate are supposed to, on one hand endear us to the humanity of Lipstadt and her team, and on the other, to make sure we get the message that a doubter like Irving is to be hated, given the sacred subject which he has dared to question. But Timothy Spall, who plays Irving, despite the phony Etonian accent he adopts and perpetually high-pitched, straining voice (which little resembles Irving in real life), comes across as somewhat sympathetic. After the verdict is read we see Irving gallantly approach the barrister Rampton, congratulating him and offering to shake hands. Irving is rebuffed. There is a fundamental decency that permeates his underdog status and it is part of his appeal in *Denial*.

Lipstadt thinks it's outrageous that Irving believes there are actually *two points of view* on World War II history. There is only one point of view, she hectors. But don't the best parents and teachers convey to their youthful charges the truism that there *at least* two sides to *every* issue? Yet in Lipstadt's inquisitorial, claustrophobic "Holocaust" world, there can only be one.

Yet another unintentionally exculpatory factor for Mr. Irving is the realization that a regiment of Lipstadt's researchers pored over every extant speech he ever gave, and the several million words he wrote, in search of an error (about dozen or so were found). If any one of us had every word we wrote or spoke through most of our lives examined, there would be plenty of grist for any detractor's mill. Only two Irving errors are submitted: a questionable interpretation of a morgue at Auschwitz, and misattributed words in a note by Heinrich Himmler; these are not exactly earth-shaking derogations of his historiography.

Meanwhile, the original grounds for Irving's libel suit against Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books—that they lied about his having stolen from the Moscow archives in Russia, and by claiming that he was associated with Hamas and other Arab terror organizations—are indeed found to be lies, just as David said. *He was indeed libeled by Penguin and Lipstadt*. Few who watch *Denial* will know that fact, or know of the intimidation tactic aimed at presiding Justice Charles Gray (Alex Jennings), when the Israeli ambassador with a full retinue of gun-toting guards, seated himself prominently in the courtroom during the trial. The message conveyed could not have been lost on the judge, nor the audience: a sovereign state, armed to the teeth, had a vested interest in an outcome of the trial favorable to their heroine, *Dvora*. (Lipstadt refers to herself by that Hebrew variant of her name when recalling her mother's prophecy about her).

Other revelations from the makers of this movie:

- *Denial* informs us there were never any photographs of any of the millions of “Jews” in any of the gas chambers because (wait for it): the Germans would not allow it; which doesn’t explain why no German personnel took photos surreptitiously, or were not bribed to do so, or why photos of an event that is said to have happened tens of thousands of times, were not otherwise leaked.
- *Denial* informs us that Auschwitz was never designed as an extermination camp. From the beginning it was a labor camp and it only later changed its function.
- During the trial, Irving’s “no holes no holocaust” challenge to Auschwitz “expert” Robert Jan van Pelt (Mark Gatiss) is never answered, even though an answer is promised in the next court session.
- If we are listening carefully, we hear a reporter state, albeit as an audio voiceover on a scene of jostling media, that Justice Gray praised Irving’s skill as a military historian.
- In London, a grim-faced woman with a cinematic aura of sanctity identifies herself privately to Lipstadt as a “Holocaust survivor.” Lipstadt informs her defense team that this woman is indeed a “Holocaust survivor” who is qualified to testify. What is the basis of “renowned historian” Lipstadt’s corroboration of the woman’s identity and credentials as a witness? She showed Lipstadt some faded numbers tattooed on her arm. This is proof? What a joke.

If you’re already a true believer, the film may further cement your belief, but for thinking individuals who are paying attention, *Denial* alerts curious minds to the existence of a substantial body of dissent, going so far as to feature Mr. Irving’s website on-camera, as well as the covers of his books. Viewers of the film who follow up with an Internet search for the *Leuchter Report* or the “Zündel trial” (few though these may be) are going to encounter a world of revisionist discovery and intellectual challenge.

As we often remind our readers, our enemies are not invincible, any more than they are infallible. Their victory is not inevitable. They make big mistakes and *Denial* is one of them: a 109-minute commercial of sorts for a valiant writer whose reputation is still very much intact.

We seldom have the occasion to write the following words, but it is delightful to do so now: Thank you, Hollywood!

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